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Paul et al.

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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES**

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(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

May 7, 2010 (IN) 1276/CHE/2010

(51) **Int. Cl.**

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G06Q 30/04	(2012.01)
H04L 29/06	(2006.01)
H04L 29/08	(2006.01)
H04W 28/16	(2009.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***G06Q 30/02*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 30/04*** (2013.01); ***H04L 29/06*** (2013.01); ***H04L 65/1069*** (2013.01); ***H04L 67/025*** (2013.01); ***H04L 67/18*** (2013.01); ***H04W 28/16*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G06Q 30/02; G06Q 30/04; H04L 29/06; H04L 65/1069; H04W 28/16

See application file for complete search history.

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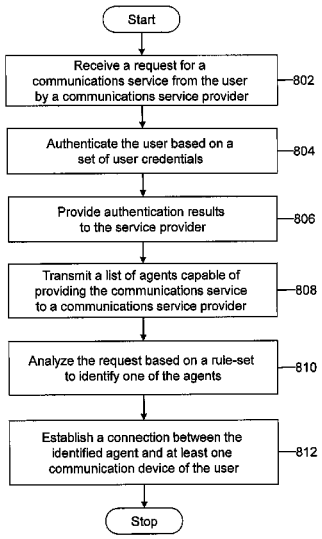
(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention provides a method and a system for providing at least one communications service to one or more service providers by a communications service provider. Communications capabilities of the communications service provider are sliced into a plurality of virtual slices and each of the plurality of virtual slices is configured for a different service provider from among the one or more service providers. At least one communications service is provided to each of the one or more service providers through a respective configured virtual slice by the communications service provider. Each of the one or more service providers further provides the communications service to a user through the respective configured virtual slice in collaboration with the communications service provider.

18 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



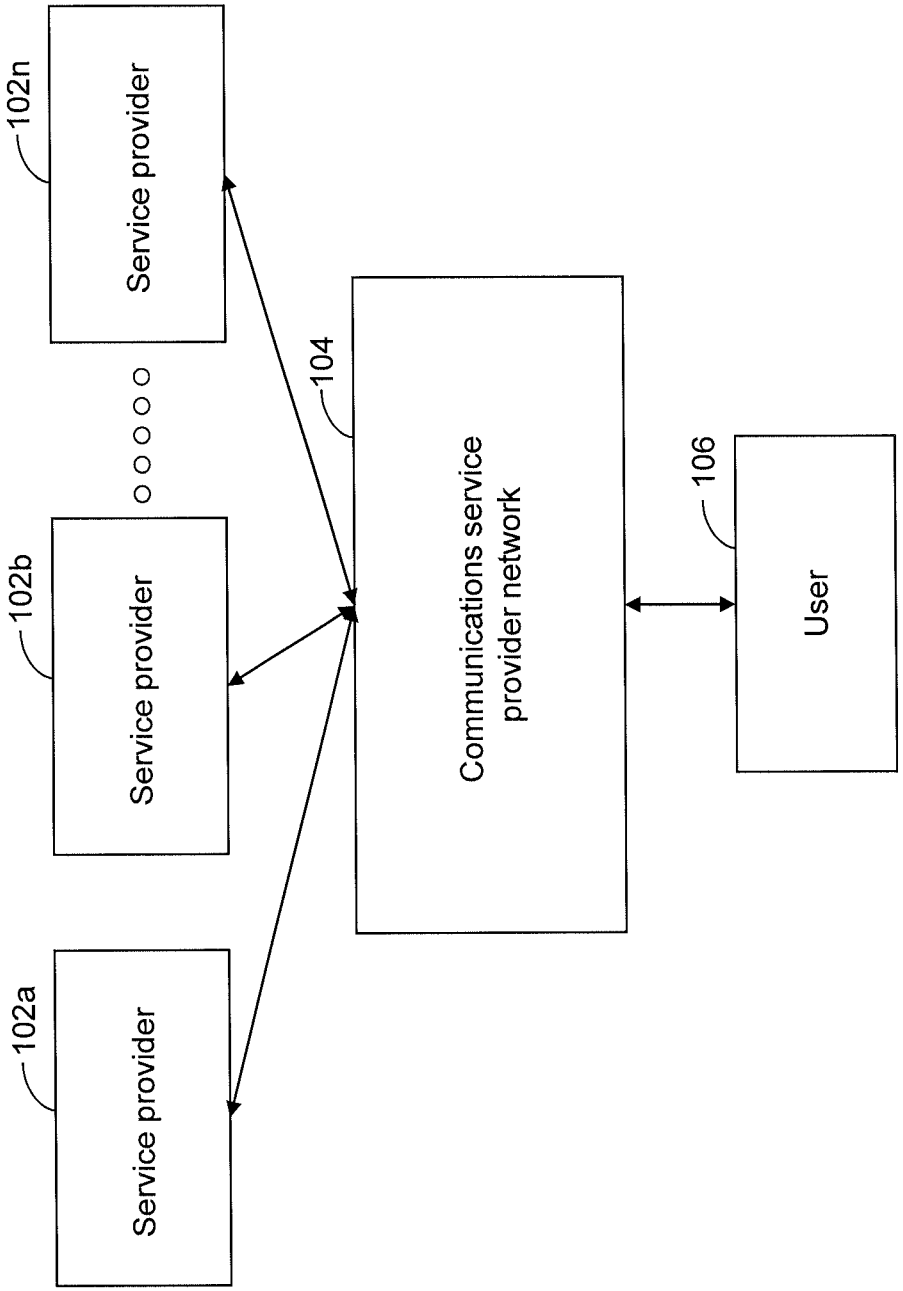

102n
Service provider
102b
Service provider
102a
Service provider
104
Communications service provider network
106
User

FIG. 1

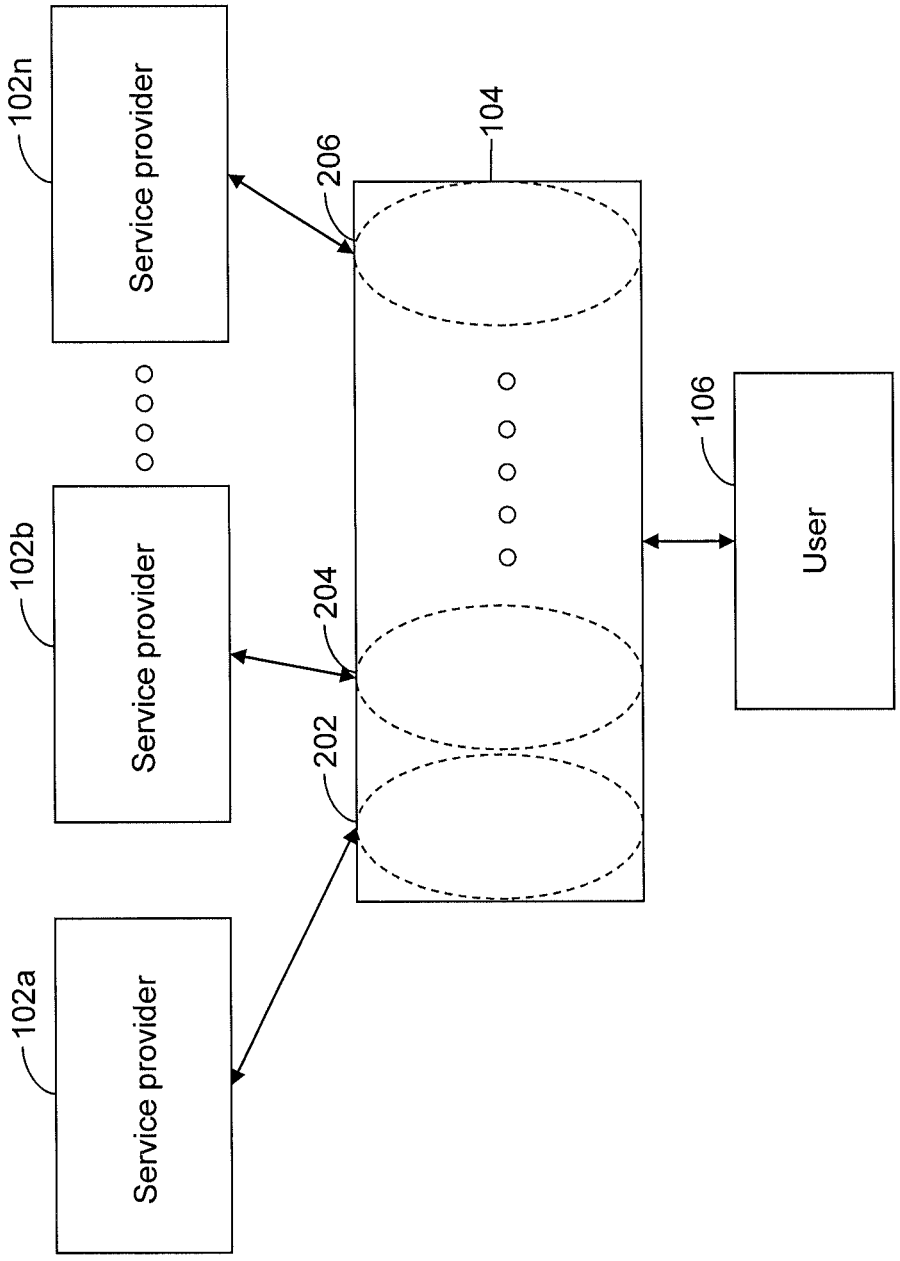

102n
Service provider
102b
Service provider
102a
Service provider
104
206
204
202
106
User

FIG. 2

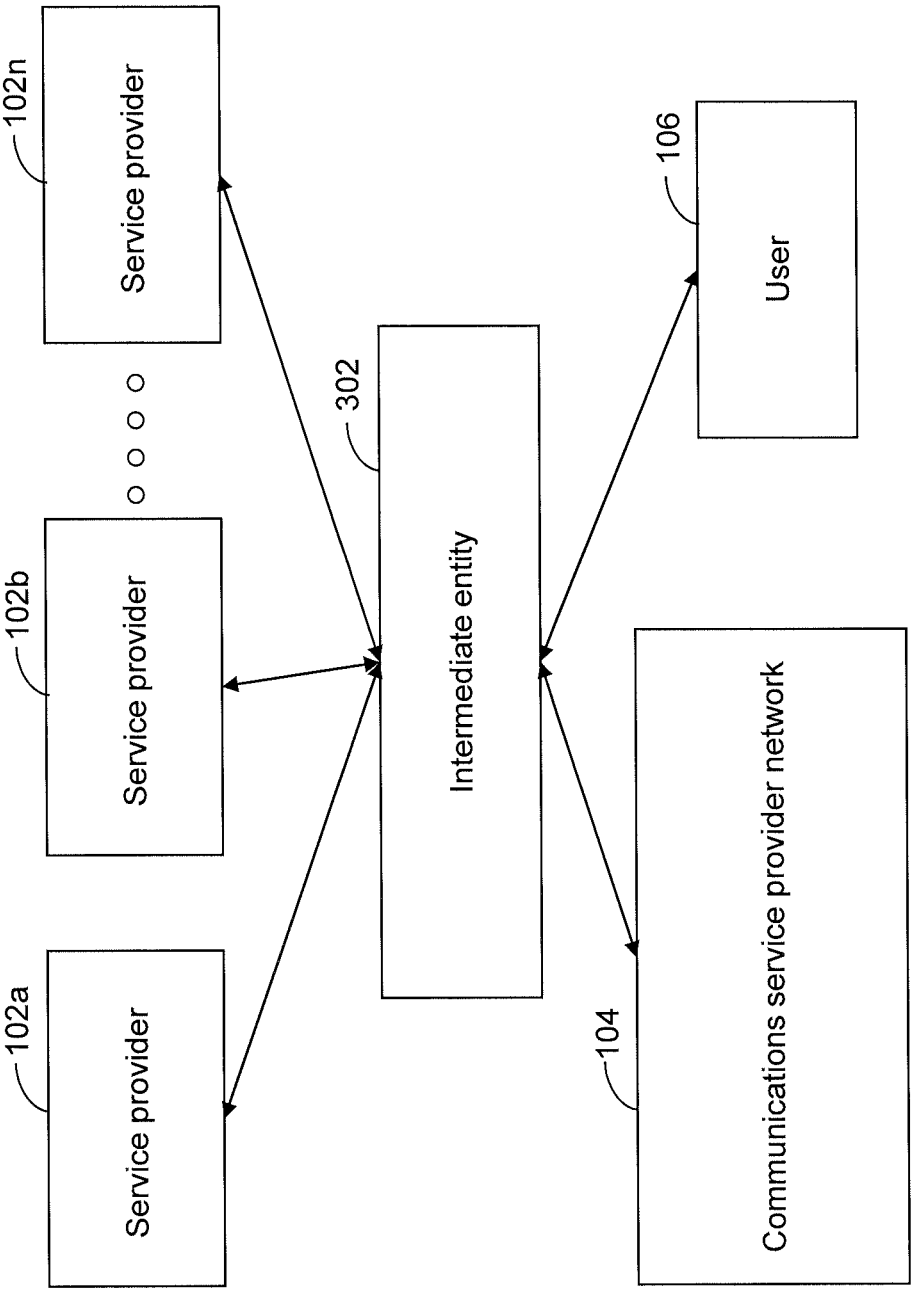

102n
Service provider
102b
Service provider
102a
Service provider
302
Intermediate entity
106
User
104
Communications service provider network

FIG. 3

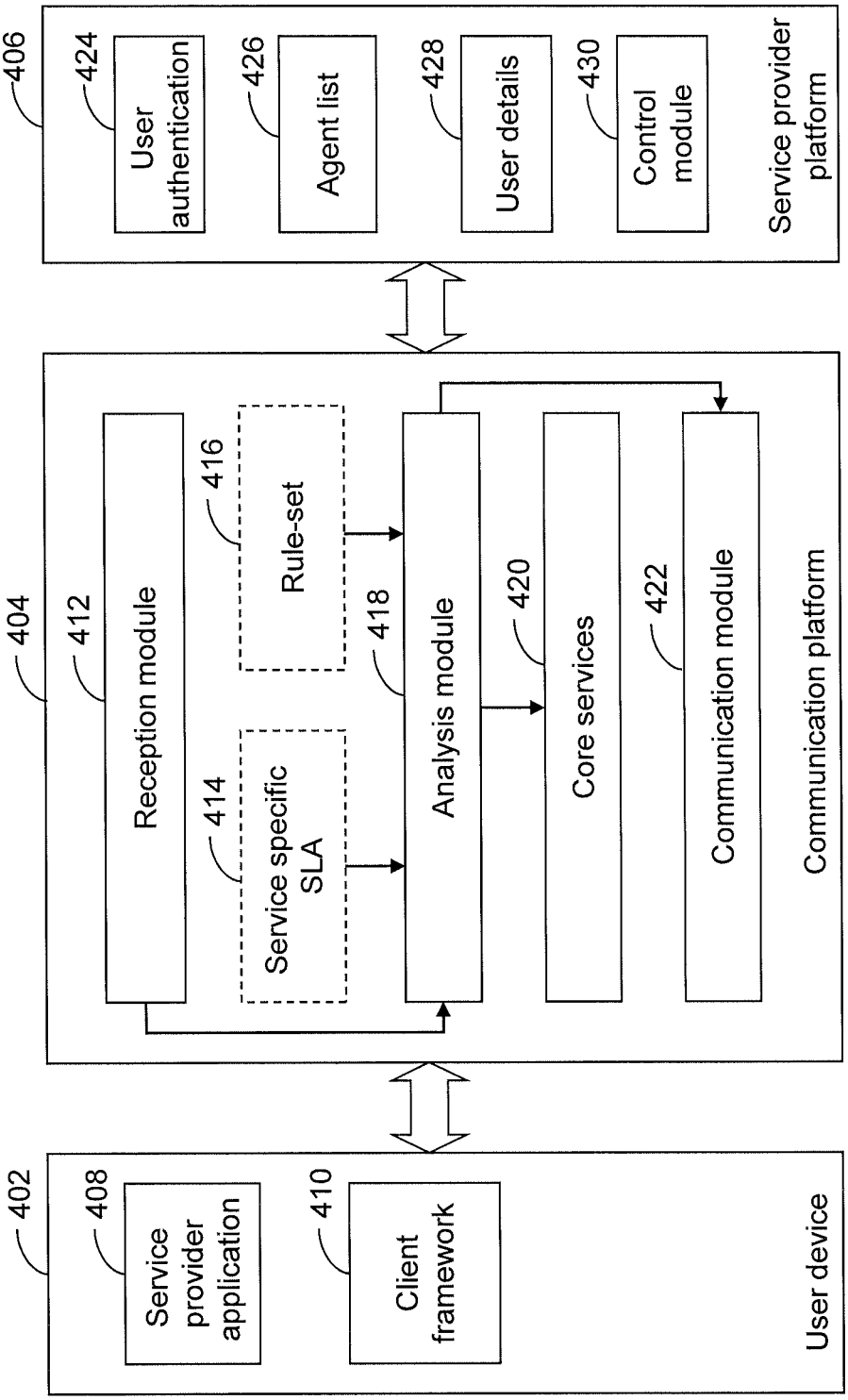

406
424
User authentication
426
Agent list
428
User details
430
Control module
Service provider platform
404
412
Reception module
416
Rule-set
414
Service specific SLA
418
Analysis module
420
Core services
422
Communication module
Communication platform
402
408
Service provider application
410
Client framework
User device

FIG. 4

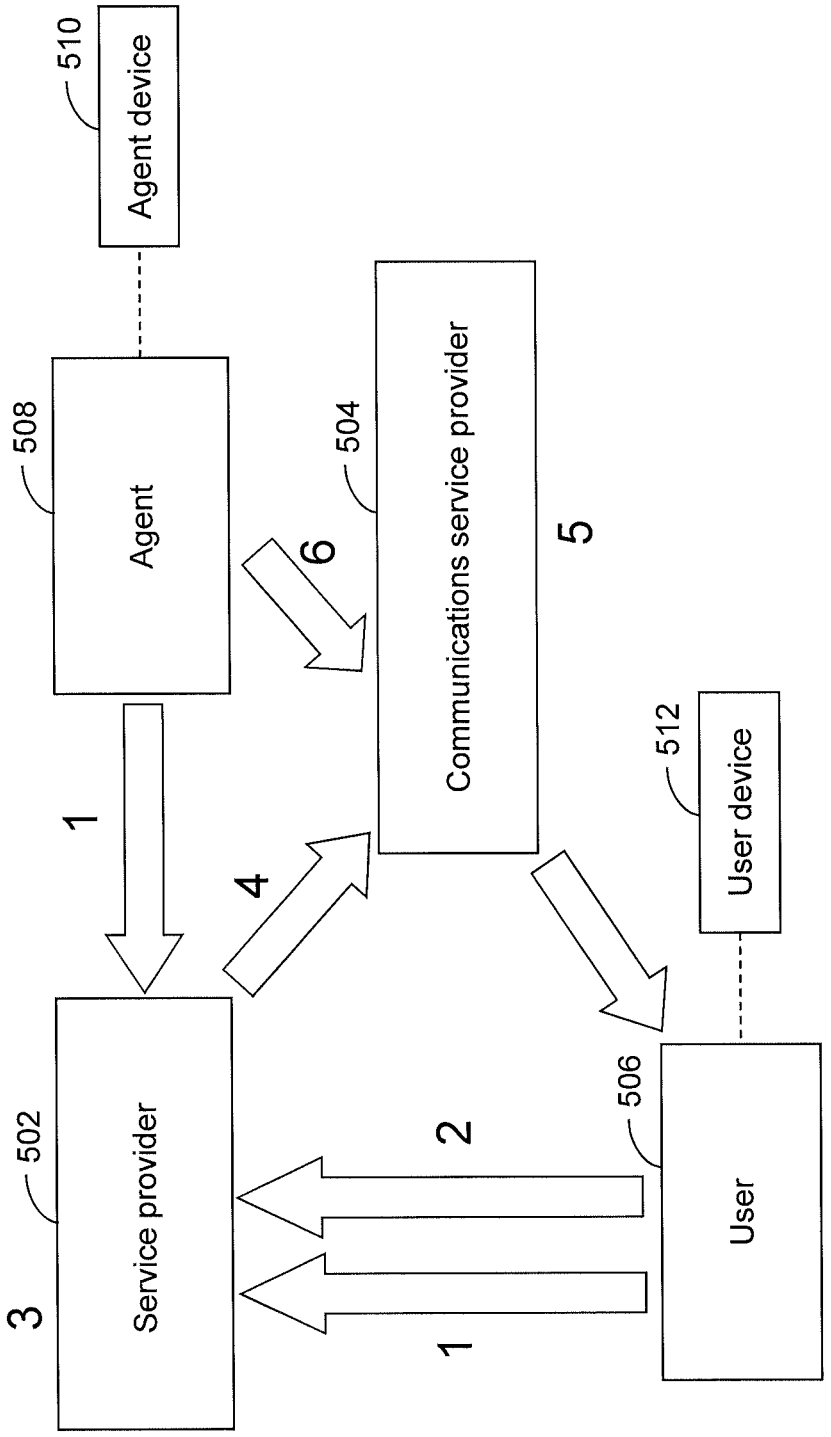

510
Agent device
508
Agent
504
Communications service provider
5
6
1
4
512
User device
502
Service provider
506
User
2
3
1

FIG. 5

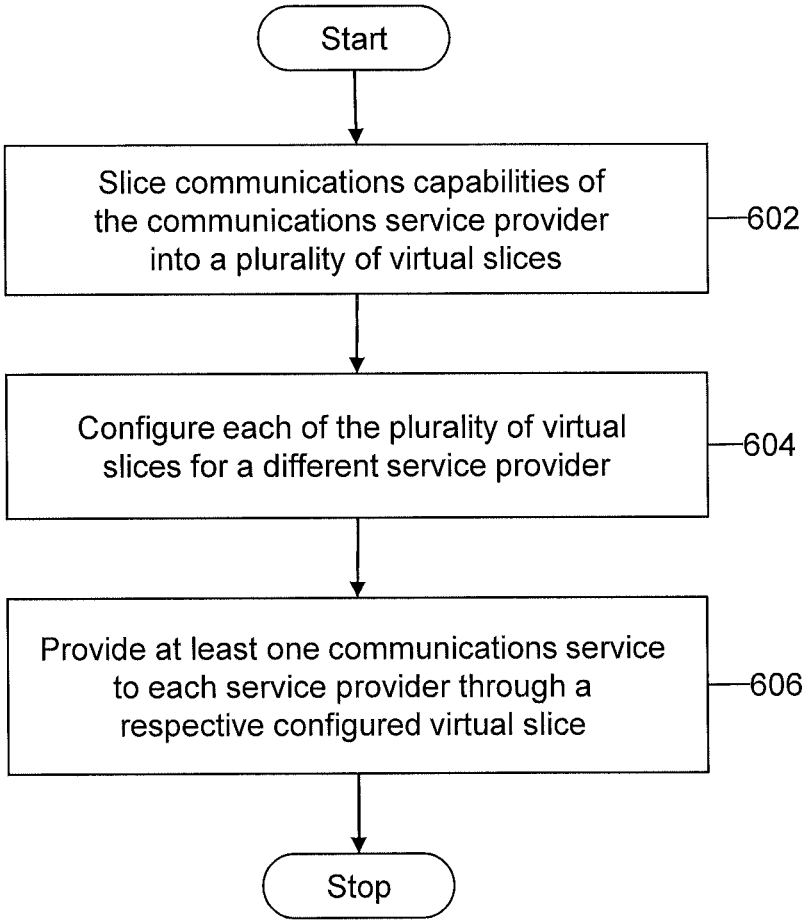

Start
Slice communications capabilities of the communications service provider into a plurality of virtual slices
602
Configure each of the plurality of virtual slices for a different service provider
604
Provide at least one communications service to each service provider through a respective configured virtual slice
606
Stop

FIG. 6

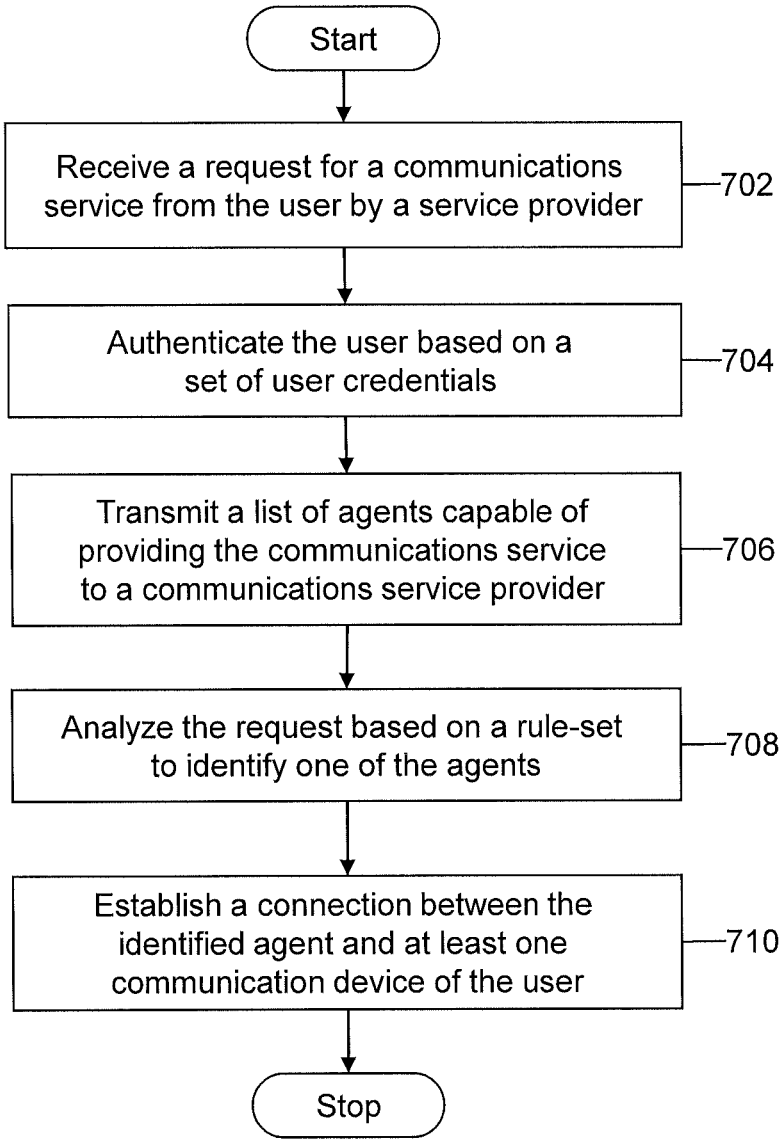

Start
Receive a request for a communications service from the user by a service provider
702
Authenticate the user based on a set of user credentials
704
Transmit a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to a communications service provider
706
Analyze the request based on a rule-set to identify one of the agents
708
Establish a connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device of the user
710
Stop

FIG. 7

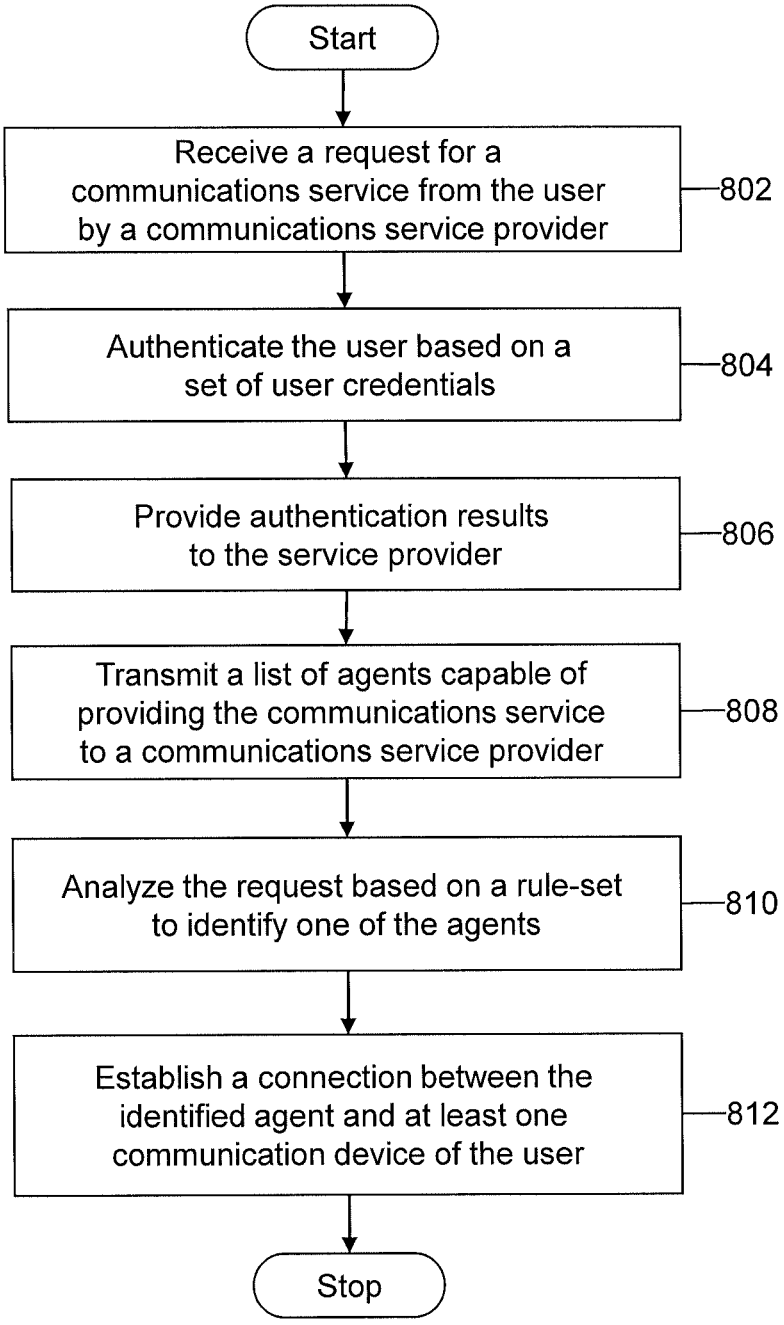

Start
Receive a request for a communications service from the user by a communications service provider
802
Authenticate the user based on a set of user credentials
804
Provide authentication results to the service provider
806
Transmit a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to a communications service provider
808
Analyze the request based on a rule-set to identify one of the agents
810
Establish a connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device of the user
812
Stop

FIG. 8

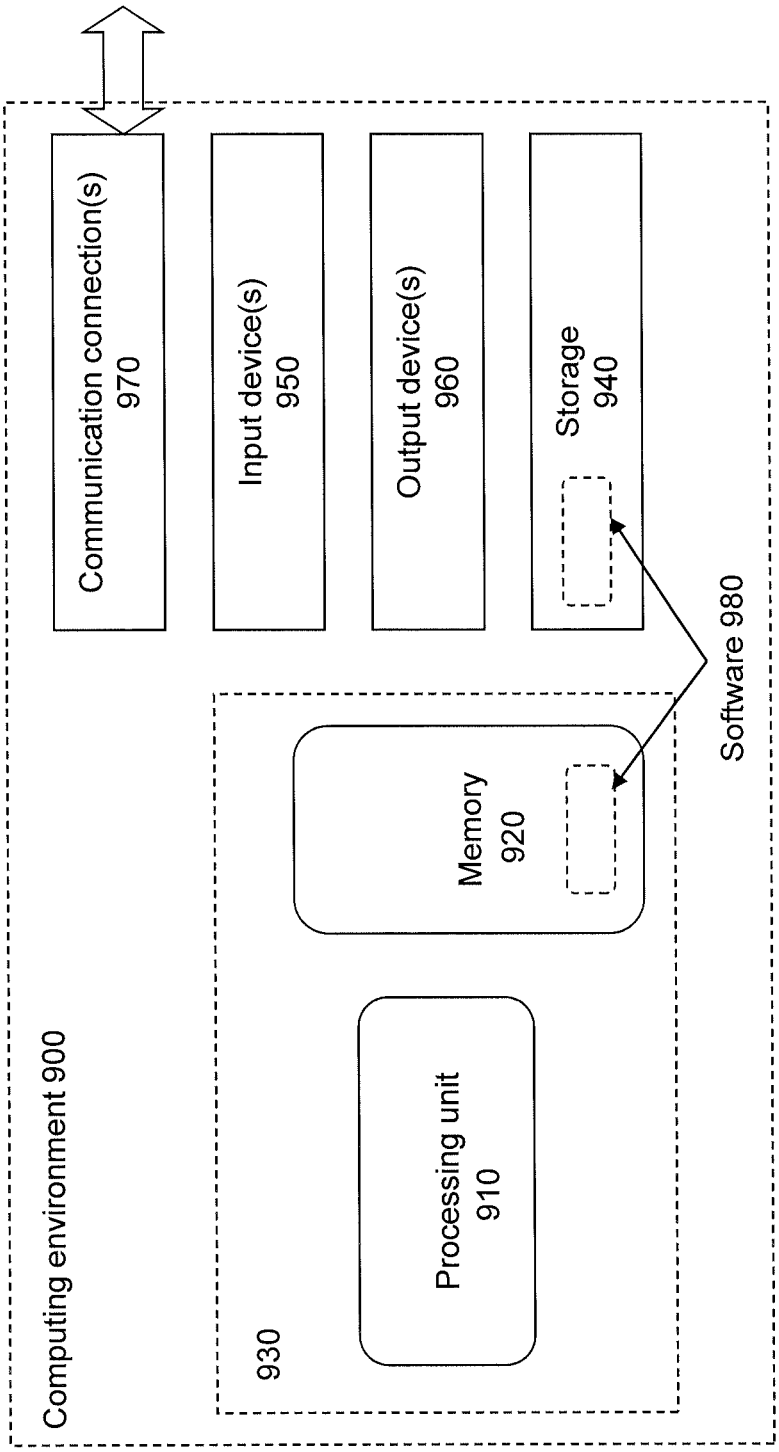

Computing environment 900
Communication connection(s) 970
Input device(s) 950
Output device(s) 960
Storage 940
Software 980
930
Memory 920
Processing unit 910

FIG. 9

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This application is a divisional of pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/071,668, filed Mar. 25, 2011, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Service providers, as the name suggests, provide various services to their subscribers. Examples of service providers include, but are not limited to, a healthcare provider, a financial services provider, an internet service provider and so forth. Typically, a user has to subscribe to a service provider to avail the services offered by the service provider. Once the user registers himself with the service provider, the user can avail the services of the service provider. Over the years, service providers have been trying to provide more and more value-added services to their subscribers.

An example of a service that a healthcare service provider may want to provide to its users is a remote healthcare service. Such a service may enable the user to avail healthcare services remotely while sitting at home. In the current scenario, the healthcare provider can provide such a service to its users as long as the healthcare provider has broadband connectivity and its users have the same. However, such an arrangement will have at least the following limitation: to provide such a service, the healthcare provider will have to incur capital and operational expenses. The capital expense would come from the bank of high-end application servers, video servers, and expensive networking equipment. The operational expense would come from high-bandwidth leased lines, running a full-fledged IT service to maintain the networking infrastructure and the servers, keeping them operational 24×7, and employing highly skilled personnel who would be responsible for maintaining and managing sophisticated multimedia communications system for setting up multiparty connections between the desired parties.

It can be seen that having such an arrangement does not make economic sense for the healthcare provider to incur all these expenses associated with managing a complex communications infrastructure since managing communications infrastructure is not its competency.

On the other hand, managing communications infrastructure is the core competency of a communications service provider. As is known, a communications service provider provides telecommunication services to its subscribers. Recently, communications service providers have started video and mobile services, in addition to voice and data services. The subscribers of such a communications service provider could be both: other service providers, such as the service providers mentioned earlier, and end users. In order to stay competitive and realize the full potential of the communications infrastructure, the communications service providers need to provide value-added services to their users, especially other service providers. These other service providers, in turn, should be able to utilize these value-added services in offering novel services to their users.

Thus, there is a need for a method and a system that will enable the communications service provider to provide various value-added services to service providers. Further, the method and system should also enable the service providers

to provide novel services to their users without incurring any additional capital and operational expenses.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method for providing at least one communications service to one or more service providers by a communications service provider. The method includes slicing communications capabilities of the communications service provider into a plurality of virtual slices. The communications capabilities comprise a set of predefined core services in addition to communications infrastructure. The method further includes configuring each of the plurality of virtual slices for a different service provider from among the one or more service providers. Configuring each of the plurality of virtual slices comprises customizing the communications capabilities for each of the plurality of virtual slices based on a rule-set provided by the one or more service providers. Finally, the method includes providing at least one communications service to each of the one or more service providers through a respective configured virtual slice by the communications service provider. Each of the one or more service providers is capable of providing the communications service to a user through the respective configured virtual slice.

The present invention relates to a system for providing at least one communications service to one or more service providers by a communications service provider. The system includes a platform configured to provide a communications service provider with the ability to slice communications capabilities of the communications service provider into a plurality of virtual slices. The communications capabilities comprise a set of predefined core services in addition to communications infrastructure. The platform is further configured to configure each of the plurality of virtual slices for a different service provider from among the one or more service providers. Configuring each of the plurality of virtual slices comprises customizing the communications capabilities for each of the plurality of virtual slices based on a rule-set provided by the one or more service providers. Additionally, the platform is configured to provide at least one communications service to each of the one or more service providers through a respective configured virtual slice by the communications service provider. Each of the one or more service providers is capable of providing the communications service to a user through the respective configured virtual slice.

The present invention relates to a method for providing a communications service to at least one user over a communication channel by a service provider, wherein the service provider is allocated a virtual slice of communication capabilities by a communications service provider for providing the communications service. The method includes receiving a request for the communications service from the user through a communication device, wherein the request is received by the service provider offering the service the user having access to the communication device. The method further includes authenticating the user based on a set of user credentials provided by the user at the time of creating the request. The method also includes transmitting, to the communications service provider, a list of one or more agents capable of providing the communications service along with the request, the list being formed based on a first set of predefined factors. Further, the method includes analyzing the request in accordance with a rule-set to identify one of the one or more agents, wherein the one of the one or more agents are identified by the communications service provider based on a second set of

predefined factors. Additionally, the method includes establishing a connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device of the user through which the user accesses the communications service over the communication channel.

The present invention relates to a system for providing a communications service to at least one user over a communication channel. The system includes a first platform configured to provide at least one service provider with the ability to receive a request for a communications service offered by the service provider, the request received from a user through a communication device over the communication channel. The first platform is further configured to authenticate the user based on a set of user credentials provided by the user at the time of creating the request. Additionally, the first platform is configured to transmit, to a communications service provider, a list of one or more agents capable of providing the communications service along with the request, the list formed based on a first set of predefined factors. The system also includes a second platform configured to provide a communications service provider with the ability to analyze the request in accordance with a rule-set to identify one of the one or more agents, wherein the one of the one or more agents are identified based on a second set of predefined factors. The second platform is also configured to establish a connection between the identified agent and the communication device of the user through which the user accesses the communications service over the communication channel.

The present invention relates to a system for providing a communications service to a user over a communication channel. The system includes a plurality of interfaces configured to interface with at least a service provider, a communications service provider, and at least one communication device. The system further includes a reception module configured to receive a request for a communications service from the service provider, wherein the request received by the service provider from the user. The reception module is also configured to receive a list of one or more agents capable of solving the request, the list formed by the service provider based on a first set of predefined factors. The system further includes an analysis engine configured to analyze the request in accordance with a rule-set to identify one of the one or more agents, wherein the one of the one or more agents is identified based on a second set of predefined factors. Finally, the system includes a communication module configured to provision communication resources for establishing a connection between the identified agent and the user based on the analysis, wherein the communications service provider subsequently establishes the connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device over the communication channel.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will be better understood when the following detailed description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings in which like characters represent like parts throughout the drawings, wherein:

FIG. **1** shows an environment **100** in which the present invention can be practiced in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a block diagram depicting allocation of virtual slices to multiple service providers by a communications service provider **104** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **3** shows an environment **200** in which the present invention can be practiced in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **4** is a block diagram depicting various modules of a system **400** for providing a communications service to a user in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **5** is a block diagram depicting the flow of events between various system elements in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **6** is a flow chart depicting a method for providing a communications service to one or more service providers by a communications service provider, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **7** is a flow chart depicting a method for providing a communications service to a user by a service provider, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **8** is a flow chart depicting a method for providing a communications service to a user by a service provider, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. **9** illustrates a generalized example of a computing environment **900**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The following description is the full and informative description of the best method and system presently contemplated for carrying out the present invention which is known to the inventors at the time of filing the patent application. Of course, many modifications and adaptations will be apparent to those skilled in the relevant arts in view of the following description in view of the accompanying drawings and the appended claims. While the system and method described herein are provided with a certain degree of specificity, the present technique may be implemented with either greater or lesser specificity, depending on the needs of the user. Further, some of the features of the present technique may be used to get an advantage without the corresponding use of other features described in the following paragraphs. As such, the present description should be considered as merely illustrative of the principles of the present technique and not in limitation thereof, since the present technique is defined solely by the claims.

The present invention, in its entirety, discloses a multimedia multimode communications platform that is deployed at a communications service provider's end. The communications platform interfaces with one or more service providers as also with multiple user devices registered with the one or more service providers and the communications service provider. The communications platform enables the communications service provider to provide communications services to one or more service providers. Further, the communications platform enables the one or more service providers to provide various communications services to multiple users using communications capabilities of the communications service provider. As used in the context of this disclosure, a communications service refers to a service that is managed by the one or more service providers in conjunction with the communications service provider. Various embodiments of the present invention have been described below in conjunction with figures.

FIG. **1** shows an environment **100** in which the present invention can be practiced, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Environment **100** includes service providers **102***a*-**102***n*, a communications service provider network **104**, and a user **106**.

In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, communications capabilities of communications service provider network **104** are distributed among service providers **102***a*-**102***n* in the form of virtual slices. Each of the service providers **102***a*-**102***n* then provides a communications service to user **106** through the virtual slices allocated to it. That is, service providers **102***a*-**102***n* utilize the communication capabilities of communications service provider network **104** and provide the communications service to user **106**. Details on the communications capabilities of communications service provider network **104** have been described in conjunction with FIG. **2**.

Service providers **102***a*-**102***n* provide different services to user **106**. Examples of services that service providers **102***a*-**102***n* may provide include, but are not limited to, healthcare, banking, hospitality, and consulting. It should be noted that each service provider from among service providers **102***a*-**102***n* may provide a different service to user **106**. The method of providing different services to user **106** by service providers **102***a*-**102***n* has been described in detail in conjunction with FIG. **4** and FIG. **5**. As used herein, a communications service refers to a service that is managed by service provider **102** in conjunction with communications service provider **104**.

In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, communications service provider network **104** may be any type of communication network that is capable of transmitting information, such as voice, data, short messaging (SMS), multimedia messaging (MMS), facsimiles, and any other type of information that may be transmitted in accordance with methods of this invention including a PSTN, a GSM network, TDMA, UMTS, GPRS, and any other known or later developed network. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the communications service provider (not shown in the figure) controlling communications service provider network **104** is a telecom operator. However, the communications service provider may also include cable companies, satellite TV providers, internet service providers, and so forth.

User **106** is registered with both service provider **102** and communications service provider network **104**. User **106** has at least one communication device (not shown in the figure) through which user **106** accesses the communications service provided by service provider **102**. The communication device may include a mobile phone, a laptop, a desktop computer, a multimedia messaging device (MMS), a short messaging device (SMS), and/or any other type of commercially available communication device capable of communicating through the communications service provider network **104**.

FIG. **2** is a block diagram depicting allocation of virtual slices of communications service provider network **104** to multiple service providers **102***a*-**102***n* in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **2** includes multiple service providers **102***a*-**102***n*, a communications service provider network **104** and a user **106**. As shown in the figure, communications capabilities associated with communications service provider network **104** are divided into multiple individual slices **204**, **206** and **208**.

In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the communication capabilities of communications service provider network **104** enable provision of one or more communications services to each of service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. The communications capabilities of communications service provider network **104** include various predefined core services along with communications infrastructure. The predefined core services include, but are not limited to, location-based service, presence-based service, subscriber authentication service, multimedia service, instant messaging service, notification service, interactive voice service, conferencing service, and media streaming service.

Through the virtual slices allocated to service providers **102***a*-**102***n* by the communications service provider, each service provider provides one or more communications service to user **106**. In other words, the communications service is jointly managed by a service provider, from among service providers **102***a*-**102***n*, and the communications service provider and provided to user **106**. As depicted in the figure, all the virtual slices are non-overlapping.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, each of service providers **102***a*-**102***n* provides a rule-set to the communications service provider (not shown in the figure) controlling communications service provider network **104**. The rule-set defines, among other things, a service flow for each of the communications services being provided through communications service provider network **104** to each service provider. The communications service may be of two types: basic service and composite service. A basic service refers to a service that is delivered by invoking only one or two predefined core services and does not involve evaluation of any complex rules. A composite service, on the other hand, refers to a service that is delivered by invoking more than two predefined core services. Additionally, the composite service usually involves complex rule sets to be evaluated. Thus, the rule-set includes a service flow for each communications service along with any other rules specific to each service provider.

Thus, the communications capabilities of communications service provider network **104** are virtually sliced and each virtual slice, such as virtual slices **204**, **206** and **208**, is allocated to an individual service provider from among the service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. Prior to allocating the virtual slices to a service provider, however, the communications service provider configures each virtual slice based on the rule-set provided by the service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. It should be noted that configuring each virtual slice includes customizing the communications capabilities of each of the virtual slices based on the rule-set provided by the service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. Further, configuring the virtual slice also includes provisioning a set of network resources by the communications service provider. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the network resources include, but are not limited to, bandwidth and access/traffic channels. Through the individual virtual slices of communications service provider network **104**, one or more communications service is provided to service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. Each of the service providers **102***a*-**102***n* further provides the communications service to one or more users. The method for providing the communications service to the one or more users by the service providers **102***a*-**102***n* is described in conjunction with FIG. **4** to FIG. **7**.

In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, a predefined billing model is established among the service provider, the communications service provider and the user. As per the billing model, the communications service provider bills the service provider based on usage of the communications capabilities of a respective virtual slice by the service provider. Further, the service provider bills the user based on the usage of the communications service by the user. Similarly, an assurance model is also established between the service provider and the communications service provider that enables equitable sharing of risks associated with delivering the communications service between the service provider and the communications service provider. Furthermore, a revenue model is also established for distributing

revenues between the service provider and the communications service provider in proportion to value delivered by the respective configured virtual slice to its respective service provider.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the communications service provider provides the one or more communications service to each of the service providers **102***a*-**102***n* in accordance with a predefined service level agreement (SLA) between the involved parties. As is known in the art, an SLA is a service contract where the level of service is formally defined between the involved parties. Typically, the SLA specifies various parameters such as levels of availability, serviceability, performance, operation, or any other attributes of the service (for example, billing, assurance etc.). In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the SLA may be any of a dynamic SLA and a static SLA. A dynamic SLA refers to an SLA that is negotiated every time prior to providing the service. In other words, certain aspects of the SLA may need to be negotiated every time before the communications service provider provides the communications service to each of the service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. On the other hand, a static SLA does not involve negotiation every time the service is provided. It is also possible that the SLA contains both a static SLA section and a dynamic SLA section.

FIG. **3** shows an environment **300** in which the present invention can be practiced in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. Environment **300** includes multiple service providers **102***a*-**102***n*, an intermediate entity **302**, a communications service provider network **104** and a user **106**. Service providers **102***a*-**102***n* provide various communications services to user **106** who accesses a communications device (not shown in the figure) available at intermediate entity **302**. The communications services are provided to user **106** through communications service provider network **104**.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, intermediate entity **302** is a multi-service kiosk controlled by a kiosk service provider (not shown in the figure). The kiosk may have a communication device, such as a personal computer, that may be accessed by various users, such as user **106**. That is, the kiosk service provider (KSP) leverages communications capabilities of communications service provider network **104** and makes the communications service available to multiple service providers **102***a*-**102***n*. The multiple service providers **102***a*-**102***n*, in turn, provide the communications service to various users, such as user **106**.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, user **106**, who is registered with service provider **102***a*, for example, visits intermediate entity **302** and provides personal information for authentication purposes. Intermediate entity **302** transmits the personal information of user **106** to service provider **102***a*. Service provider **102***a* authenticates user **106** based on the personal information and provides a communications service requested by user **106** through communications service provider network **104**. User **106** accesses the communications service at the communications device present at intermediate entity **302**. For example, service provider **102***a* may arrange for a live video conference to be set up between user **106** and a business expert (not shown in the figure) through the communications device present at intermediate entity **302**. It should be noted that more than two parties may also be involved in the video call. Thus, intermediate entity **302** provides access to various communications services delivered through communications service provider network **104**. The communications services include, but are not limited to, broadband, video calls, and streaming video.

Provision of the communications service to user **106** may also involve factors such as language translation and subsequent text-to-speech conversion. The language translation and text-to-speech conversion are performed by the communications service provider controlling communications service provider network **104** using techniques known in the art. In addition, the communications service provider is also capable of handling providing quality of service on the video call, trans-coding video content to suit capability of the communications device and connection at intermediate entity **302**, setting up a secure multi-party multi-media conference call on demand. Details of the capabilities of the communications service provider have been explained in conjunction with FIG. **4**.

FIG. **4** is a block diagram depicting various modules of a system **400** for providing a communications service to a user in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. System **400** includes a user device **402**, a communication platform **404**, and a service provider platform **406**. User device **402** includes a service provider application **408** and a client framework **410**. Communication platform **404** includes a reception module **412**, a service-specific SLA **414**, a rule-set **416**, an analysis module **418**, core services **420** and a communications module **422**. Service provider platform **406** includes a user authentication module **424**, an agent list **426**, user details **428**, and a control module **430**.

User device **402** creates a request through service provider application **408** for accessing a communications service provided by a service provider (not shown in the figure) controlling service provider platform **406**. User device **402** sends the request to service provider platform **406**. User authentication module **424** receives the request and authenticates the user based on details provided by the user at the time of creating the request. Based on the authentication results, control module **430** analyzes the request to check the type of communications service desired by the user. Control module **430** then accesses agent list **426** and user details **428** to identify a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to the user based on a set of predefined factors. Control module **430** further transmits the list of agents and the request to communication platform **404**. Reception module **412** receives the request along with the list of agents and forwards it to analysis module **418**. Analysis module **418** accesses service-specific SLA **414** and rule-set **416** and then selects an agent from among the list of agents capable of providing the communications service to the user. Communications module **422** establishes a connection between the user and the selected agent by provisioning a set of network resources.

User device **402** includes a service provider application **408** and a client framework **410**. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, service provider application **408** is an application specific to the service provider that allows the user to connect or log on to the service provider channel. Client framework **410** enables operation of service provider application **408** on user device **402**. Thus, for example, in case user device **402** is a laptop, service provider application **408** may be a service provider's website and client framework **410** may be a browser that enables the user to log on to and access the service provider's website. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, client framework **410** is provided by the communications service provider to enable operation of service provider application **408**, provided by the service provider. User device **402** may be any of a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a television, a desktop computer and a laptop.

Service provider platform **406** receives the request sent by the user through user device **402**. User authentication module

424 compares the details entered by the user at the time of creating the request with the corresponding details of the user stored in user details 428. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the details provided by the user may include any unique login details of the user such as name of the user, a registration number of the user provided by the service provider and/or the communications service provider, a password and so forth. User authentication module 424 authenticates the user based on the comparison and passes the authentication results to control module 430. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, user authentication module 424 is a database. In case the authentication fails, an error message is displayed to the user on user device 402.

Based on the authentication results, control module 430 analyzes the received request and forms a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to the user based on predefined factors that include, but are not limited to, user profile, user subscription details, communications service requested and qualifications of the one or more agents. Each of these predefined factors will now be described in further detail. It should be noted that, in an embodiment, the functionality of control module 430 may be performed by user authentication module 424 itself.

The user profile refers to personal details of the user provided by the user at the time of registration that are stored with the service provider. However, the user profile also provides information on current device capabilities of the user. For example, the user profile may provide information on details such as memory of user device 402, audio-video capabilities of user device 402, and so forth. The user profile further includes preferences of the user with respect to the communications device on which the user wishes to access the communications service. In other words, though the user creates the request through user device 402, the user may wish to access the communications service on a different device. For example, the user may create the request through a mobile device but may want to have a video chat with an agent through a television. The user profile is identified by analysis module 418 before setting up a connection between the user and a selected agent, as will be explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

The user subscription details refer to the level of subscription of the user. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the level of subscription may be of two types: communication-based subscription level and service-based subscription level. Through the communication-based subscription level, the user selects the mode of communication over a combination of user devices. That is, the user may choose to subscribe to a number of devices, such as television, mobile phone and a personal computer. Further, the user may also choose the mode of communication for the subscribed devices such as text, audio and video communication. In accordance with an embodiment, the service-based subscription level is specific to the type of services provided by the service provider. For example, if the service provider is a healthcare provider, the user may subscribe to any or all of consultative services, advisory services and so forth.

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, subscription of the user may be of various types that define the type of service that can be made available to the user. For example, a user may have subscribed to bronze-level service which makes available only voice calls. Another user may have subscribed to gold-level service which makes the user eligible for multimedia calls. Still another user may have subscribed to platinum-level service which ensures that the user is entitled to guaranteed service within a specific duration of time. Such levels of subscription may be defined by the service provider when the user wants to register for the services offered by the service provider.

The list of agents selected also depends on the type of communications service requested by the user. For example, the user may demand consultation with an expert in real-time before deciding whether the user should invest in a particular stock option. Hence, a human agent is selected in such a case. In another case, the user may want general information about stock options available to him. Thus, in this case, a media server having a video file containing the general information on stock options may be selected. Additionally, the qualifications of the agents are also considered before forming the agent list. In other words, factors such as experience of the agent, background of the agent, and so forth may be considered to arrive at an individual score for each agent and based on the individual scores, the list of agents may be formed. It should be noted that the qualifications of the agents are provided to the service provider by the agents at the time of registration. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, control module 430 keeps updating the individual scores of the agents at regular intervals based on a feedback provided by the user.

Thus, control module 430 forms the list of agents capable of providing the desired communications service and sends the list to reception module 412. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, control module 430 prioritizes the list of agents based on a predefined factor, such as, for example, the individual scores before handing over the list to reception module 412. Further, control module also sends the request to reception module 412.

Reception module 412 receives the list of agents along with the request and forwards the list and the request to analysis module 418. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, reception module 412 performs another level of authentication before passing on the request to analysis module 418. This authentication may be performed based on the user details available with the communications service provider. In case the authentication fails, reception module 412 does not forward the information to analysis module 418. Instead, an error message may be displayed to the user on user device 402.

Analysis module receives the list of agents and the request from reception module 412. Analysis module 418 then accesses service-specific SLA 414 and a rule-set 416. Features of service-specific SLA 414 and rule-set 416 have been described in detail in conjunction with FIG. 2 and hence, will not be described here. Analysis module 418 analyzes the request and based on the user subscription details, dynamically selects a set of communications services available to the user. That is, analysis module 418 checks whether the user has actually registered to the communications service that the user desires to access. Analysis module 418 also dynamically selects content accessible to the user based on at least one of the user profile and the user subscription details. In other words, analysis module 418 checks whether the content desired to be accessed by the user can be provided to the user on the user's communications device by analyzing the user profile. For example, if the communications device registered by the user for accessing the service does not have video capabilities and the user requests to have a video call with an agent, analysis module 418 notifies the user accordingly.

In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, analysis module 418 also determines quality of service (QoS) requirements for the communications service dynamically. Analysis module 418 dynamically maps the communications service with the QoS requirements as speci-

fied in service-specific SLA **414**. It should be noted that service-specific SLA **414** may have a dynamic SLA component, as described earlier in conjunction with FIG. **2**.

Analysis module **418** then selects an agent from among the list of agents handed over by reception module **412**. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, analysis module **418** selects the agent based on at least one of network connectivity of the one or more agents, current location of the one or more agents, availability of the one or more agents, device capabilities of communication devices registered by the one or more agents, type of the communications service requested, urgency of the communications service requested, and overall accessibility scores of the one or more agents. The overall accessibility scores of the agents may be calculated by taking into account the network connectivity of the agents, their current location, and other such parameters. Thus, analysis module **418** selects the agent most suitable for providing the communications service to the user. For example, if the user is subscribed to premium service and is connected to an Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), analysis module **418** may select an agent who is also connected to broadband IPTV. It should be noted that urgency of the communications service requested is also specified by the user at the time of creating the request.

Based on the communications service requested by the user, analysis module **418** invokes corresponding core services **420** and passes on the details of the selected agent to communication module **422**. Core services **420** include the predefined core services, explained earlier in conjunction with FIG. **2**. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, analysis module **418** also identifies location of the agents and the location of the user requesting the communications service before selecting the agent. It will be appreciated that analysis module **418** performs its various functions with the help of core services **420** and by adding intelligence to the predefined core services.

Communication module **422** receives the agent details and the user details from analysis module **418**. Communications module **422** provisions necessary network resources for establishing a connection between a communications device of the selected agent and the communications device of the user. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, communications module **422** establishes the connection through invocation of one or more core services from among core services **420** by analysis module **418**. Further, depending on the type of communications device of the user, communication module **422** provisions the communications device. Thus, for example, if the communications device is a television, communications module **422** may provision a set-top box associated with the television before establishing the connection. However, in case the communications device of the user is a mobile phone, provisioning of the mobile phone may not be necessary.

Communication module **422** notifies the selected agent about the request and sends the details of the user to the selected agent on a communications device registered by the user. Communications module **422** further establishes a connection between the communications device of the user and a suitable communications device of the selected agent. It should be noted that the user may create a request through one communications device but may access the communications service on another communications device, based on the user's preferences and the user profile. Similarly, the agent may be notified on one communications device but he may interact with the user through another communications device. As discussed earlier, the connection may be any of a video call, an audio call, and so forth.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, communication platform **404** includes multiple service templates (not shown in the figure) that consist of various basic services that include, but are not limited to, selecting an agent based on the rule-set provided by a service provider, dynamically provisioning QoS and security in the network and any necessary communication elements, dynamically setting up an end-to-end connection between user device **402** and the selected agent, notifying the selected agent about the impending request by the user, and sending user details to the selected agent. It will be apparent to a person skilled in the art that using these service templates, any service may be quickly instantiated thereby improving the efficiency of the overall system. It will be understood that communication platform **404** includes multiple interfaces for interfacing with user device **402** and service provider end **406**.

FIG. **5** shows separation of roles between a service provider and a communications service provider, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **5** includes a service provider **502**, a communications service provider **504**, a user **506**, an agent **508**, a user device **510** and an agent device **512**.

At step **1**, user **506** and agent **506** register with service provider **502**. It should be noted that the registration process is a one-time process. At step **2**, user **506** requests for a communications service offered by service provider **502** through a user device **512** registered by user **506** with service provider **502** at the time of registration. Service provider **502** receives the request and at step **3**, authenticates user **506** based on details entered by user **506** at the time of creating the request. Service provider **502** compares the details entered by the user at the time of creating the request with the registration details to authenticate user **506**. Further, service provider checks subscription details of user **506** and generates a list of agents, such as agent **508**, capable of providing the communications service to user **506**. Service provider **502** then provides the request details, user subscription details, and the list of agents to communications service provider **504**.

Communications service provider **504** receives the information from service provider **502** and based on a set of rules provided by service provider **502** earlier, selects an agent, for example, agent **508** from among the list of agents. Communications service provider **504** further checks the user profile of user **506** and the availability of agent **508** on a registered communications device, such as agent device **510**. Communications service provider **504** then notifies agent **508** about the request and passes the request details to agent **508**. Further, communications service provider **504** provisions a set of network resources and user device **512**, if needed, and subsequently establishes a connection between user **506** and agent **508** so that user **506** and agent **508** may interact through a communications session. The communications session may be any of a video call, an audio call, and so forth.

FIG. **6** is a flowchart depicting a method for providing a communications service to one or more service providers by a communications service provider, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

At step **602**, communication capabilities of a communications service provider are divided into multiple non-overlapping virtual slices. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the communication capabilities of the communications service provider include various predefined core services along with communications infrastructure. The predefined core services include, but are not limited to, location-based service, presence-based service, subscriber authentication service, multimedia service, instant messag-

ing service, notification service, interactive voice service, conferencing service, and media streaming service.

At step **604**, each of the plurality of virtual slices is configured for a different service provider. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, configuring each virtual slice includes customizing the communications capabilities of each of the virtual slices based on the rule-set provided by the service providers. Further, configuring the virtual slice also includes provisioning a set of network resources by the communications service provider. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the network resources include, but are not limited to, bandwidth and access/traffic channels.

At step **606**, through the virtual slices, one or more communications service is provided to the service providers by the communications service provider. Each of the service providers then provides the communications service to one or more users through the virtual slices, that is, using the communications capabilities of the communications service provider.

FIG. **7** is a flowchart depicting a method for providing a communications service to a user by a service provider, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

At step **702**, a request for a communications service is received by a service provider. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the request is created by a user through a communications device registered by the user with the service provider. The communications device may be any of a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a television, a desktop computer and a laptop.

At step **704**, the service provider authenticates the user based on details entered by the user at the time of creating the request. The service provider may compare the details entered by the user with registration details of the user stored with the service provider to authenticate the user. Further, the service provider analyzes the request to determine the type of communications service is desired by the user. The service provider then identifies a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to the user based on a set of predefined factors. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the predefined factors include, but are not limited to, user profile, user subscription details, communications service requested and qualifications of the one or more agents.

At step **706**, the service provider transmits the list of one or more agents capable of providing the communications service to a communications service provider. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the service provider prioritizes the list of one or more agents before sending the list to the communications service provider.

At step **708**, the communications service provider analyzes the request and based at least on user subscription details, a predefined SLA and a rule-set, dynamically selects a set of communications services available to the user. Further, communications service provider also dynamically selects content accessible to the user based on at least one of the user profile and the user subscription details. Additionally, the communications service provider also selects an agent from among the list of one or more agents based on at least one of network connectivity of the one or more agents, current location of the one or more agents, availability of the one or more agents, device capabilities of communication devices registered by the one or more agents, type of the communications service requested, urgency of the communications service requested, and overall accessibility scores of the one or more agents.

At step **710**, the communications service provider provisions network resources necessary to establish a connection between a communications device registered by the identified agent and a communication device of the user. The connection may be any of a video call, an audio call, and so forth. Subsequently, the communications service provider notifies the selected agent about the request and establishes a connection between the selected agent and the user.

FIG. **8** is a flowchart depicting a method for providing a communications service to a user by a service provider, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

At step **802**, a request for a communications service is received by a communications service provider. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the request is created by a user through a communications device registered by the user with the communications service provider. The communications device may be any of a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a television, a desktop computer and a laptop.

At step **804**, the communications service provider authenticates the user based on details entered by the user at the time of creating the request. The communications service provider may compare the details entered by the user with registration details of the user stored with the communications service provider to authenticate the user.

At step **806**, the communications service provider sends the authentication results to the service provider. In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the communications service provider also passes the request created by the user to the service provider.

At step **808**, the service provider performs a second-level authentication of the user based on the registration details available at the service provider's end and analyzes the request to identify a list of agents capable of providing the communications service to the user based on a set of predefined factors. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the predefined factors include, but are not limited to, user profile, user subscription details, communications service requested and qualifications of the one or more agents.

At step **810**, the communications service provider analyzes the request and based at least on user subscription details, a predefined SLA and a rule-set, dynamically selects a set of communications services available to the user. Further, communications service provider also dynamically selects content accessible to the user based on at least one of the user profile and the user subscription details. Additionally, the communications service provider also selects an agent from among the list of one or more agents based on at least one of network connectivity of the one or more agents, current location of the one or more agents, availability of the one or more agents, device capabilities of communication devices registered by the one or more agents, type of the communications service requested, urgency of the communications service requested, and overall accessibility scores of the one or more agents.

At step **812**, the communications service provider provisions network resources necessary to establish a connection between a communications device registered by the identified agent and a communication device of the user. Subsequently, the communications service provider notifies the selected agent about the request and establishes a connection between the selected agent and the user. The connection may be any of a video call, an audio call, and so forth.

Thus, the present invention discloses a multimedia multimode communications platform that is deployed at a commu-

nications service provider's end. The communications platform interfaces with one or more service providers as also with multiple user devices registered with the one or more service providers and the communications service provider. The communications platform enables the communications service provider to provide communications services to one or more service providers. Further, the communications platform enables the one or more service providers to provide various communications services to multiple users using communications capabilities of the communications service provider.

Exemplary Computing Environment

One or more of the above-described techniques can be implemented in or involve one or more computer systems. FIG. **9** illustrates a generalized example of a computing environment **900**. The computing environment **900** is not intended to suggest any limitation as to scope of use or functionality of described embodiments.

With reference to FIG. **9**, the computing environment **900** includes at least one processing unit **910** and memory **920**. In FIG. **9**, this most basic configuration **930** is included within a dashed line. The processing unit **910** executes computer-executable instructions and may be a real or a virtual processor. In a multi-processing system, multiple processing units execute computer-executable instructions to increase processing power. The memory **920** may be volatile memory (e.g., registers, cache, RAM), non-volatile memory (e.g., ROM, EEPROM, flash memory, etc.), or some combination of the two. In some embodiments, the memory **920** stores software **980** implementing described techniques.

A computing environment may have additional features. For example, the computing environment **900** includes storage **940**, one or more input devices **950**, one or more output devices **960**, and one or more communication connections **970**. An interconnection mechanism (not shown) such as a bus, controller, or network interconnects the components of the computing environment **900**. Typically, operating system software (not shown) provides an operating environment for other software executing in the computing environment **900**, and coordinates activities of the components of the computing environment **900**.

The storage **940** may be removable or non-removable, and includes magnetic disks, magnetic tapes or cassettes, CD-ROMs, CD-RWs, DVDs, or any other medium which can be used to store information and which can be accessed within the computing environment **900**. In some embodiments, the storage **940** stores instructions for the software **980**.

The input device(s) **950** may be a touch input device such as a keyboard, mouse, pen, trackball, touch screen, or game controller, a voice input device, a scanning device, a digital camera, or another device that provides input to the computing environment **900**. The output device(s) **960** may be a display, printer, speaker, or another device that provides output from the computing environment **900**.

The communication connection(s) **970** enable communication over a communication medium to another computing entity. The communication medium conveys information such as computer-executable instructions, audio or video information, or other data in a modulated data signal. A modulated data signal is a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal. By way of example, and not limitation, communication media include wired or wireless techniques implemented with an electrical, optical, RF, infrared, acoustic, or other carrier.

Implementations can be described in the general context of computer-readable media. Computer-readable media are any available media that can be accessed within a computing environment. By way of example, and not limitation, within the computing environment **900**, computer-readable media include memory **920**, storage **940**, communication media, and combinations of any of the above.

Having described and illustrated the principles of our invention with reference to described embodiments, it will be recognized that the described embodiments can be modified in arrangement and detail without departing from such principles. It should be understood that the programs, processes, or methods described herein are not related or limited to any particular type of computing environment, unless indicated otherwise. Various types of general purpose or specialized computing environments may be used with or perform operations in accordance with the teachings described herein. Elements of the described embodiments shown in software may be implemented in hardware and vice versa.

As will be appreciated by those ordinary skilled in the art, the foregoing example, demonstrations, and method steps may be implemented by suitable code on a processor base system, such as general purpose or special purpose computer. It should also be noted that different implementations of the present technique may perform some or all the steps described herein in different orders or substantially concurrently, that is, in parallel. Furthermore, the functions may be implemented in a variety of programming languages. Such code, as will be appreciated by those of ordinary skilled in the art, may be stored or adapted for storage in one or more tangible machine readable media, such as on memory chips, local or remote hard disks, optical disks or other media, which may be accessed by a processor based system to execute the stored code. Note that the tangible media may comprise paper or another suitable medium upon which the instructions are printed. For instance, the instructions may be electronically captured via optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted or otherwise processed in a suitable manner if necessary, and then stored in a computer memory.

The following description is presented to enable a person of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention and is provided in the context of the requirement for a obtaining a patent. The present description is the best presently-contemplated method for carrying out the present invention. Various modifications to the preferred embodiment will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art and the generic principles of the present invention may be applied to other embodiments, and some features of the present invention may be used without the corresponding use of other features. Accordingly, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiment shown but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and features described herein.

The invention claimed is:

1. A system for providing a communications service, the system comprising:

one or more computer processors configured to:

partition a communications service provider network into a plurality of non-overlapping virtual slices, each virtual slice comprising:

communications infrastructure including at least a defined communication bandwidth; and

at least two predefined network services that are distinct from the communications infrastructure;

one or more communication devices,

wherein each communication device is registered with both a communications service provider and at least one service provider of one or more service providers, and wherein each service provider is allocated one or

more of the plurality of non-overlapping virtual slices by the communications service provider, and each communication device is configured to be accessed by at least one user for sending a request to the at least one of the one or more service providers for obtaining communications services via the allocated one or more virtual slices, and

wherein each service provider defines levels of subscription for the user at the time of registration, and wherein each service provider provides a different service to the user based on the levels of subscription assigned to the user;

a storage device to store computer executable instructions being executed by one or more of the computer processors for configuring:

a plurality of interfaces to:

interface with the at least one of the one or more service providers, the communications service provider, and at least one communication device;

a control module to:

form a list of one or more agents capable of providing the communication service to the user, wherein the list is prioritized based on a first set of predefined factors;

a reception module to:

receive the request for obtaining the communications services from the at least one of the one or more service providers, the request being received by the at least one of the one or more service providers from the user; and

receive the list of the one or more agents capable of solving the request;

an analysis module to:

analyze the request in accordance with a rule-set to identify one of the one or more agents, the one of the one or more agents identified based on a second set of predefined factors and on the priority of the agents; and

a communication module to:

provision communication resources for establishing a connection between the identified agent and the user based on the analysis, wherein the communications service provider subsequently establishes the connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device over the communication channel via the allocated one or more virtual slices.

2. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the first set of predefined factors comprises at least one of user profile, user subscription details, communications service requested and qualifications of the one or more agents.

3. The system as recited in claim **2**, wherein the analysis module dynamically selects a set of communications services available to the user based on the user subscription details.

4. The system as recited in claim **2**, wherein the analysis module dynamically selects content accessible to the user based on at least one of the user profile and the user subscription details.

5. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the analysis module dynamically determines quality of service requirements for the communications service.

6. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the analysis module dynamically maps the communications service into predefined quality of service requirements to dynamically determine the quality of service requirements for the communications service.

7. The system as recited in claim **2**, wherein the communication module provisions the at least one communication device based on the user profile prior to establishing the connection between the identified agent and the at least one communication device.

8. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the communication module provisions a plurality of network resources prior to establishing the connection between the identified agent and the at least one communication device.

9. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the identified agent is a server.

10. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the identified agent is a human agent.

11. The system as recited in claim **10**, wherein the communication module establishes a connection between one or more communication devices registered by the human agent and the at least one communication device of the user.

12. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the rule-set comprises a service flow for each communications service offered by the service provider.

13. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the second set of predefined factors comprises at least one of network connectivity of the one or more agents, current location of the one or more agents, availability of the one or more agents, device capabilities of communication devices registered by the one or more agents, type of the communications service requested, urgency of the communications service requested, and overall accessibility scores of the one or more agents.

14. The system as recited in claim **1**, wherein the communication device is at least one of a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a television, a desktop computer and a laptop.

15. A computer program product comprising a non-transitory computer readable medium having a computer executable instructions code embodied therein for providing a communications service, the computer executable instructions code performing:

configuring one or more computer processors to:

partition a communications service provider network into a plurality of non-overlapping virtual slices, each virtual slice comprising:

communications infrastructure including at least a defined communication bandwidth; and

at least two predefined network services that are distinct from the communications infrastructure;

registering the one or more communication devices with both a communications service provider and at least one service provider of one or more service providers, wherein

each service provider is allocated one or more of the plurality of non-overlapping virtual slices by the communications service provider, and each communication device is configured to be accessed by at least one user for sending a request to the at least one of the one or more service providers for obtaining communications services via the allocated one or more virtual slices, and

wherein each service provider defines levels of subscription for the user at the time of registration, and wherein each service provider provides a different service to the one or more user based on the levels of subscription assigned to the user;

configuring a control module to:

form a list of one or more agents capable of providing the communication service to the user, wherein the list is prioritized based on a first set of predefined factors;

configuring a reception module to:

receive a request for a communications service from the at least one of the one or more service providers, the

request received by the at least one of the one or more service providers from the communication device;

receive the list of one or more agents capable of solving the request;

configuration of an analysis module to:

analyze the request in accordance with a rule-set to identify one of the one or more agents, the one of the one or more agents identified based on a second set of predefined factors and on the priority of the agents; and

configuration of a communication module to:

provision communication resources for establishing a connection between the identified agent and the user based on the analysis, wherein the communications service provider subsequently establishes the connection between the identified agent and at least one communication device over the communication channel via the allocated one or more virtual slices.

16. The computer program product as recited in claim **15**, wherein the first set of predefined factors comprises at least one of user profile, user subscription details, communications service requested and qualifications of the one or more agents.

17. The computer program product as recited in claim **15**, wherein the second set of predefined factors comprises at least one of network connectivity of the one or more agents, current location of the one or more agents, availability of the one or more agents, device capabilities of communication devices registered by the one or more agents, type of the communications service requested, urgency of the communications service requested, and overall accessibility scores of the one or more agents.

18. The computer program product as recited in claim **15**, wherein the communication device is at least one of a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a television, a desktop computer and a laptop.

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